

MY DHAKA



PHOTOS: FAISAL AHMED BHUBON, STAR ARCHIVE

## Midnight steaks and old friendships: sehri nights in Dhaka

FAISAL AHMED BHUBON

Ramadan nights in Dhaka are not just about food – they are about friendship, memory, and the joy of gathering.

Ramadan turns the city into a place where sehri is both spiritual and social, a celebration of bonds that endure beyond the meal itself. There is a duality to these nights – faith and festivity, reflection and indulgence. Sehri is not just about preparing for the fast; it has become a ritual of togetherness.

For many, it is a chance to reconnect, share stories, and savour the rare quiet of Dhaka at three in the morning.

Rickshaws rattle through quiet streets, tea stalls glow under single bulbs, and the rush of traffic softens into a hum. However, this lull after iftar fades as soon as Tarawih ends. Dhaka is anything but sleepy, because in this lunar month the midnights are not for rest.

It is the hour when sehri seekers step out, tempted by the smoky aroma of kebabs drifting into the night. People go for all kinds of gourmet delights, from crispy ghee-fried paratha with murg musallam to bowls of hearty soup.

This year, meaty dishes are especially popular with the young crowd.

Steakhouses and grills across the city stay open until dawn, their neon signs shining on sehri seekers.

After weighing several options – Steakout, Meat Theory, Wood House Grill, and Steak & Marrow – we finally settled on Steak & Marrow, drawn by reviews and the lure of its packages.

The welcome was immediate. Staff greeted us warmly, their service polished yet personal. We chose a sehri package priced at BDT 2,400, reduced to BDT 1,600 as a Ramadan discount.

The spread was hearty: a rare-medium steak, rice, salted vegetables, mushrooms and sausage, and a small bun. The steak was tender and flavourful, its char balanced by earthy vegetables and the richness of the sides. Presentation was simple but satisfying – no frills, just honest food meant to be enjoyed in good company.

The day's tiredness vanishes the moment you see your friends or family. The raucous energy inside swells as the food arrives, laughter rising above the

clink of cutlery as we joined that tide of nocturnal diners.

Outside, vendors serve parathas, beef curry, and steaming cups of cha to those who prefer tradition over trend.

But the night was never just about food. Around the table sat four friends bound by more than appetite. We are all former students of Government Laboratory High School, our bond stretching back more than a decade.

Beside me was Tazbeer Masnoon Dip, navigating the corporate world as a merchandising officer. Across the table sat Sakib Shahari, a businessman thriving in Chawkbazar's bag trade. At the far end, Surid Shaharia Zaman, a young entrepreneur, spoke of his start-up, while I am a system engineer at Amber IT.

The laughter, the stories, even the silences between bites – all carried the weight of years. Ramadan has always been a month of reflection, but that night it was also about renewal.

For us, sehri was more than a meal. It

was a reminder that even as life pulls us in different directions – into IT systems, merchandising, business, and start-ups – the ties of friendship remain unbroken.

In the glow of Steak & Marrow's midnight lights, with steak on our plates and memories in our hearts, we celebrated not just Ramadan, but the enduring bond that began in the classrooms of Government Laboratory High School.

### SEHRI SPOTS WORTH KNOWING

Durbin Bangla Restaurant, Mohakhali Known for its homestyle Bangla flavours, Durbin Bangla draws late-night crowds with hearty sehri plates. Popular items include beef curry, parathas, and khichuri – served in generous portions at affordable prices. The atmosphere is lively, with families and groups of friends filling the space until just before Fajr.

Abesh Restaurant, Mirpur A rising favourite among Mirpur residents, Abesh offers a mix of traditional and modern sehri dishes. Their handi beef and fried parathas are especially popular, often paired with steaming cups of tea. The restaurant has become a local hub, where young diners gather to enjoy sehri in a more casual, neighbourhood setting.



## Women survivors forced to navigate

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The video file, however, had already been copied to multiple devices.

When Nilufa finally refused to meet his demands, the perpetrator sent edited video clips to her husband, framing her as a willing participant. Her husband, blind to the trauma she had endured, beat her up and then divorced her.

Nilufa's ordeal illustrates a burgeoning crisis. The 2024 National Violence Against Women Survey, conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) with the assistance of UNFPA, reveals that 8.3 percent of women in Bangladesh are now targets of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

While TFGBV is a cross-cutting issue requiring coordination between law enforcement agencies and health and judicial systems, the state's response has largely been police-centred.

Structural barriers include a limited number of cyber tribunals, low capacity, and a lack of expertise beyond mainstream platforms like Facebook.

These challenges are compounded by fragmented services and weak coordination across health, legal, and judicial systems. While police remain the primary formal contact, survivors demand a multisectoral response.

In Nilufa's case, institutional hurdles were immediate. As Nilufa approached the Bagerhat Sadar Police Station, she was redirected to a court. When police were directed to investigate, the case was assigned to a male officer.

"As a woman, I was deeply unsettled by his [the investigation officer] questions," she recalled, highlighting a common barrier for survivors of digital sexual violence.

Her ordeal began to ease only when she was referred to the Women Help Desk (WHD) of the police station. There, female officers follow a survivor-centered Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) developed through a partnership between UNFPA and Bangladesh Police.

This initiative, launched in Bagerhat and nine other districts in October 2024, replaced ad hoc responses with sensitive, specialised protocols for cyber violence.

"The female officers there were friendly... I could share all the details with them without hesitation," said Nilufa, now back at her tailoring shop after a brief pause, still carrying the weight of her trauma.

Though police intervention

eventually forced the perpetrator to delete the files, he was never detained. The probe is ongoing and the man remains free.

### SYSTEMIC SHORTCOMINGS

Under the UNFPA police partnership, 969 police officers (501 women, 468 men) received training in mental health, GBV protocols, and TFGBV technicalities across nine districts last year.

However, these trained officers are sometimes hamstrung by a lack of basic tools.

At Bagerhat Sadar Police Station, the WHD lacks a dedicated computer. This forces survivors to go to nearby markets and narrate their intimate traumas to male computer operators who type out their accounts for a fee.

Rumana Nasrin, a sub-inspector at the station, noted that while female officers provide empathetic initial support, cases are often handed over to male investigation officers who lack specialised TFGBV orientation.

She stressed the need for sensitivity training for investigation officers, especially male ones.

Not only the police, but the judiciary also lags behind in cybercrime-related training. The Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI) lacks specific programmes for cyber tribunal judges as well as lawyers.

Arunav Chakraborty, a judge of the Khulna Cyber Tribunal, said he did not receive any formal training on cybercrimes after his appointment in August last year.

Similarly, Sheikh Moniruzzaman, a lawyer at the Bagerhat Judge's Court, said that hardly any lawyers in the district have been trained in cybercrime issues, and most of them lack the technical skills to deal with complex digital evidence.

Priya Ahsan Chowdhury, a Supreme Court lawyer, said the legal framework remains weak because forensic evidence remains optional, often forcing courts to rely on screenshots that can easily be manipulated.

She noted that forensic reports must be made mandatory, and judges need to be provided with specialised training.

Emphasising the importance of mental health support for victims, Nusrat Jahan, a programme officer at the Bagerhat One-Stop Crisis Cell (OCC), said that most survivors of digital abuse go straight to police, unaware of the necessity of medical and psychosocial support.

"Victims see this as a purely legal issue even though they suffer from

significant mental distress," she explained.

The Bagerhat OCC is currently understaffed, operating with only Nusrat as a programme officer.

In the absence of a computer operator who records cases, Nusrat must juggle managerial work, case filing, and counselling.

When contacted, Shahela Pervin, deputy director of the Department of Women Affairs (DWA) in Bagerhat, said that while cases over physical violence are common, social stigma keeps many women from reporting online harassment.

"Complaints over such incidents rarely reach us... When they do, we advise survivors to contact police or the 109 helpline."

Since the helpline typically refers cases back to law enforcers, police remain the primary source of redress.

If local police are unable to track anonymous perpetrators, cases are forwarded to the central Police Cyber Support for Women Unit at the Police Headquarters (PHQ) in Dhaka.

Without a streamlined tracking system, these complaints often vanish into an overwhelmed national queue, leaving both local officers and survivors in legal limbo.

AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (Media) at the PHQ, pointed out significant hurdles in obtaining metadata from international tech platforms.

He also clarified that investigative tools are often mislabelled as "intrusive surveillance" by rights groups, though they are essential for identifying offenders.

Cybercrime consultant Gazi Mahfuz Ul Kabir said perpetrators frequently use platforms like Telegram or Terabox to store content, making it difficult for police to remove those.

Experts stress that women and girls must be taught digital literacy, made aware of technology-facilitated crimes, and given clear guidance on where to seek remedy.

"For women and girls to be safe online, we need to put in place strong and inclusive laws and coordinated response systems, and ensure that tech companies operate responsibly," said Abu Sayed Sumon, UNFPA specialist on gender-based violence.

Sustainable multi-sectoral collaboration and shared responsibilities are essential for establishing a violence-free environment. From homes to classrooms to workplaces, whole-of-society action is needed to end digital violence against women and girls, he added.

## Dhaka stocks log in biggest single-day

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Those who weren't affected by the Ukraine war have been affected this time, he said.

"Maybe it is an overreaction. But it is also true that loadshedding has started already in March. If the energy price rise, every product will be affected and thus inflation. It will have an impact on the overall economy, so investors reacted negatively," he added.

The market plunged as geopolitical tensions unsettled investors, said SM Galibur Rahman, head of research

and strategic planning at Shanta Securities.

"Investors opted for caution amid heightened geopolitical risks and concerns over potential fuel shortages across the country," he added.

Meanwhile, the Shariah-compliant index DSES dropped 35 points, or 3.36 percent, to 1,013, while the DS30, the blue-chip index, shed 91.53 points, or 4.55 percent, to 1,919.

Stocks have been on a downward trajectory in recent days amid persistent sell-offs, with the DSEX earlier losing 208 points.

## Iran picks new leader as war escalates

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assault and strike Iran's rulers "without mercy".

"We have an organised plan with many surprises to destabilise the regime and enable change," he said in a video statement. "We have many more targets."

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One that he was not interested in negotiating an end to the conflict that has sent energy prices skyward, hurt business and snarled global travel.

"At some point, I don't think there will be anybody left maybe to say, 'We surrender,'" Trump said.

### IRAN STRIKES GULF STATES, BANGLADESHI KILLED

Two people were killed and 12 injured after a projectile fell on a residential location in Saudi Arabia's Al-Kharj city yesterday, the Saudi Civil Defence said.

The two people killed were of Indian and Bangladeshi nationalities, it added in a post on X.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said earlier in the day that they targeted radar systems in locations including Saudi's Al-Kharj.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also said they had launched missiles towards the Israeli cities of Tel Aviv and Beersheba, as well as an airbase in Jordan.

AFP journalists heard blasts over Tel Aviv after the army identified new missiles from Iran.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said the country's forces can fight an "intense war" for six months, with a spokesman saying more advanced missiles would be used in the coming days.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain also reported Iranian drone attacks on Saturday and early yesterday, with a huge fire engulfing a government

office block in Kuwait.

Kuwait's interior ministry said two of its officers were killed "while performing duties", while the UAE said four migrant workers had died in Iranian attacks there so far.

Showing the intensity of the offensive, the UAE said air defence teams had knocked out 16 ballistic missiles and 113 drones fired towards the Gulf state yesterday. One missile fell in the sea, and four drones hit the country's territories.

Bahrain said yesterday that an Iranian drone attack had caused "material damage" to a desalination plant, though the country's electricity and water authority said the strike had not disrupted water supplies.

It was the first time an Arab country has said Iran targeted a desalination facility during the conflict. On Saturday, Iran said a US attack had struck a freshwater desalination plant on its Qeshm Island, disrupting water supplies in 30 villages, calling it "a dangerous move with grave consequences".

Saudi Arabia has told Tehran that continued Iranian attacks on the kingdom and its energy sector could push Riyadh to respond in kind, people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Lebanon has also been pulled into the conflict after the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah launched rockets and drones into Israel last week, with nearly 400 people killed by Israel over the past week, the health ministry said.

Israel killed at least four people when it struck a hotel in central Beirut yesterday, saying it had targeted Iranian commanders operating in the city – the first such strike on the heart of the Lebanese capital – amid heavy bombardment of the southern suburbs and the country's south and east.

## No Independence Day illuminations this year

Univs to close today; govt says decisions made to conserve energy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided against illuminating installations across the country on Independence Day this year as part of austerity measures to avert a potential fuel crisis amid the ongoing Middle East war, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed said yesterday.

To support the effort, all public and private universities have been asked to begin Eid holidays from today, ahead of schedule.

"Traditionally, we arrange illumination on Independence and National Day. But this time, considering the current situation and to prevent any fuel crisis, we have decided there will be no illumination nationwide," Salahuddin told reporters at the home ministry after separate meetings on Eid-ul-Fitr, Independence Day, and the March 25 Genocide Day.

The meetings focused on law and order during

**Several institutions, including Barishal University and Comilla University, began holidays yesterday, while Dhaka University, Bangladesh Agricultural University, and Jahangirnagar University will now close earlier than planned.**

Eid, smooth travel for holidaymakers, and security for national programmes on March 25 and 26.

Salahuddin said the government would observe both days with due gravity, while the home ministry would oversee all security arrangements.

On Eid preparations, the minister said the government has taken precautionary steps to prevent the usual disruptions before the holiday.

Meanwhile, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has instructed universities to remain closed until the end of their scheduled Eid holidays, in line with the energy conservation drive.

Several institutions, including Barishal University and Comilla University, began holidays yesterday, while Dhaka University, Bangladesh Agricultural University, and Jahangirnagar University will now close earlier than planned.

The education ministry has also asked institutions to follow 11 energy-saving guidelines during the period, including maximising natural daylight, halving the use of electric lights, setting air conditioners at 25°C or higher, minimising decorative lighting, and limiting vehicle use.

Following last week's losses, the key index has now shed 359 points, or 6.42 percent, according to DSE data.

"Energy is a key input for factories, and investors fear that the intensifying Iran conflict could disrupt fuel supply," said a market analyst, requesting anonymity.

Such disruptions could hamper production at listed companies, he added.

The Chittagong Stock Exchange also declined. CASPI, the port city bourse's main index, fell 419 points, or 2.83 percent, to 14,405.

### IRAN CHOOSES NEW LEADER

The clerical body charged with choosing Iran's next supreme leader could meet as soon as yesterday to name a successor to Khamenei, who was killed in an attack early in the conflict, Iranian media reported.

A majority consensus over the successor has been reached, said Assembly of Experts member Ayatollah Mohammad Mehdi Mirbaqeri, according to the Mehr news agency.

Two Iranian sources told Reuters last week that the clear favourite was Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, who amassed power under his father as a senior figure in the security forces and the vast business empire they control. Choosing him would signal that hardliners remain firmly in charge.

Trump has justified the biggest US military operation in the Middle East since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by saying Tehran posed an imminent threat to the United States, without providing evidence. He has also said Iran was too close to being able to build a nuclear weapon.

The US and Israel have discussed sending special forces into Iran to secure its stockpile of highly enriched uranium at a later stage of the war, Axios reported, citing four people with knowledge of the discussions.

Asked on Saturday about sending ground troops to secure nuclear sites, Trump said it was something they could do "later on."

The US Israeli attacks have killed at least 1,332 Iranian civilians and wounded thousands, according to Iran's UN ambassador, Amir Sa'ed Iravani.

Iranian attacks have killed 10 people in Israel. At least six US service members have been killed, with Iran saying yesterday it had struck US bases in Kuwait. Israel said yesterday that two of its soldiers were killed in southern Lebanon.